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**Email driving force in integrated campaigns**

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# Papers

## Best practice in business-to-business email

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### Abstract

Most business-to-business marketers rely on email as a core channel in their campaigns. With a high degree of clutter, ensuring your message gets delivered, opened and acted on is critical. This article offers some practical advice on techniques that can improve the effectiveness of email.

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### Introduction

Marketers attribute 23 per cent of their total sales to the email marketing channel.

(Source: Econsultancy) Email Marketing Industry Census 2014, Econsultancy in association with Adestra, available at <http://www.adestra.com/resources/downloadable-reports/2014-email-marketing-industry-census/>.

As a primary method of contacting prospects, email is the most popular marketing channel in integrated multi-channel campaigns and, in most cases, it is also the most cost-efficient. The likelihood is that all of your campaigns will include at least one email communication, so this needs to be planned and implemented carefully. In an integrated marketing campaign, emails are the driving force from which everything else stems and engages prospects.

Granted, the days of email being a stand-alone tool and a go-to move when trying to reach your prospects are long gone. But, as part of a multi-channel campaign, email is still worth its weight in gold. Why? Because of its low operational costs compared with direct mail; its ability to capture priceless data; its highly personalized approach; and its excellent behavioural tracking capabilities.

So does this mean you should just start firing out emails? Of course not. Emails are a highly valuable tool, but only when fine-tuned and used correctly.

### Start with personas

85 per cent of business-to-business marketers believe they are not using buyer personas effectively.

**Developing profiles of buyers**

(Source: Buyer Persona Institute, <http://www.buyerpersona.com/2014/08/got-buyer-personas-44-say-yes-but-85-arent-using-them-effectively.html>)

When your ongoing relationship with a business-to-business (B2B) buyer means so much to the success of your business, it is only right that you get to know them. You need to know as much as you possibly can about your prospects in order to create a knowledge-sharing relationship and differentiate yourself from your competitors. Information, such as the communication channels your prospects prefer to use and their typical buying processes, is crucial. The outcome of getting to know your prospects should be a two-page profile of each of your decision makers and influencers (a persona document). This will give your organization a clearer picture of your prospects and help you to visualize the people you are trying to reach.

**Adapting email content to personas**

With regard to email marketing, buyer personas can help determine the type of material the decision maker likes to read, the typical amount of time they spend checking emails each day, and a myriad of other helpful nuggets of information. With this in-depth information, you can now begin to adapt the style, content and tone of voice of your email in order to generate the highest level of engagement. You may have thought that an email simply contained text about your offer, but, with the use of persona documents, it can be so much more effective.

**Data quality impacts deliverability**

**Data**

21 per cent of recipients report email as spam, even if they know it isn't.

(Source: Convinceandconvert.com, <http://www.convinceandconvert.com/convince-convert/15-email-statistics-that-are-shaping-the-future/>)

When conducting a multi-channel marketing campaign and relying on the return on investment of the email channel, there is one thing above almost all others that needs to be right — data. This has the potential to make or break a campaign based on its quality. Low-quality data with duplicate entries, incorrect information and outdated contact information will have a dramatic impact on the returns generated by the email campaign, whereas high-quality data can mean your well-written and well-timed email can arrive in the inbox of the ideal decision maker.

**Marketing data set to move to opt-in**

One of the key factors in email data over the past few years (and one that is due to have a massive effect over the coming years) is opt-in legislation. All data used in an email marketing campaign should be opt-in, meaning prospects have previously agreed to be contacted for marketing purposes. It goes without saying that the forthcoming European Union (EU) Data Protection Regulation (set to replace the existing EU Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC) — which will require all contact data to have opted in to receive marketing communications (regardless of channel) — will affect marketers across the EU. Once this regulation is in place, failure to operate within the legal confines could result in businesses being hit with hefty fines.

**Capture opt-ins now**

What this means is that, if you are not already doing so, now is the time to start ensuring that your prospects, leads and customers opt in to all forms

of marketing communications, not just email (which you should have been doing already). By doing this, you will be protecting your data against the arrival of the regulation.

### Targeting goals as well as demographics

## Segmentation and personalization

Email segmentation can improve open rates by 39 per cent.

(*Source:* Allbusiness.com, [http://experts.allbusiness.com/guest\\_posts/crank-up-roi-email-marketing-campaign-segmentation/#.VRFgEUu17uc](http://experts.allbusiness.com/guest_posts/crank-up-roi-email-marketing-campaign-segmentation/#.VRFgEUu17uc))

Demographics such as industry, turnover and number of employees are standard factors by which to segment an email communication. However, when this is coupled with data gathered in the persona research, it now becomes possible to highly target emails to each decision-maker group. For example, not only can you now target managing directors from companies with more than 100 staff and a turnover in excess of £5 m, you also get to know their biggest business challenges, short-term and long-term goals and what is really important to them — highly valuable data to enable greater segmentation in your email communications.

### Talking about challenges in their language

Persona documents typically uncover information that does not feature in standard business demographics. This data not only enables a much greater level of segmentation, it also gives marketers the ability to personalize email communications like never before. By analysing this information before writing, the copywriter has the ability to ‘talk’ to the reader in a language (formal/informal) they will engage with most and also understand whether their knowledge is gained from formal education or merely experience. By referencing solutions they have used before and providing answers to objections they may have in regard to changing supplier, these highly personalized emails show a level of understanding that the reader can identify with and appreciate. A well-written and well-targeted email can be the conception point for a relationship.

### Saturation of email channel

## Response mechanisms

Over 100 billion business emails are sent and received every day.

(*Source:* Radicati Group) Email Stastics Report 2013–2017, The Radicati Group, available at <http://www.radicati.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Email-Statistics-Report-2013-2017-Executive-Summary.pdf>.

The number of business emails sent each day is staggering and it is only due to continue rising. But how many emails sent each day are actually generating a response? In a channel that is saturated with business and personal marketing communications, how do you generate results? When creating a marketing email, it is not just an opportunity to contact the reader. It has a purpose — to provoke an action. Before drafting the email, it is vitally important to define clearly what this action will be. Should the reader click on a link at the bottom, download a piece of content, call the number stated?

## Clear calls to action

Including a link to relevant company content in lead generation emails led to a conversion-to-appointment rate of 9 per cent.

(Source: Really B2B)

When the response mechanism has been determined, the email should then guide the reader towards the bottom of the email and provide them with a reason to complete the action. Where appropriate, calls to actions (telephone numbers and clickable links) can be added above the fold of the email and even interspersed throughout the text. Be aware that this may make the email look more marketing and ‘salesy’ (and ultimately less likely to generate a response).

## Review impact on open rates

If it becomes clear after the initial email broadcast that open rates have been good, but responses have been less than expected, consider reviewing the response mechanisms and the call to action placement within the email. A strong call to action featured near the top of the email may be too overpowering for the reader, especially as you are unlikely to have given them enough information yet to make them want to click. Some of the decision makers (especially those who are time-poor) may be more inclined to click a link and visit a landing page than call a salesperson. Always keep these variations in mind and strive to improve with each mail.

## Testing for device variations

### Pre-broadcast testing

The number of emails opened on Android devices has decreased by 40 per cent.

(Source: Litmus, <https://litmus.com/blog/53-of-emails-opened-on-mobile-outlook-opens-decrease-33>)

Some may think that testing takes place after the email has been sent and results start surfacing, but this is not the case. In fact, some of the most important email testing takes place before the email is sent. Given today’s modern, connected world in which people are checking emails on multiple mobile devices, a single email has to display correctly and generate the same response across all of the displays. Subject lines, pre-headers and ‘From’ names (among other things) can vary greatly depending on the device displaying them, and this means there is work to be done before the email is sent. For example, Gmail shows about 100 characters for subject line and pre-header text collectively, whereas the iPhone displays about 140 characters (in the traditional vertical view). So, for the email to appear correctly on both, it is important to limit the subject line and pre-header text to 80 characters ideally, but certainly no more than 100.

## Testing for email service provider (ESP) variations

Not only can devices change the appearance and layout of an email, so, too, can the ESP that is being used by the recipient. For example, Outlook may render an email in a different way to Hotmail, meaning that, once again, your email results can be affected. So, before an email is broadcast, it is important to test it across multiple ESPs to ensure it displays correctly. Thankfully, though, there are software programs such as Litmus that will provide comprehensive details and previews of your email across many ESPs, thereby relieving you of a great deal of legwork.

## Purpose dictates format

### Role of text-based and HTML emails

Across all industries, the average results for email marketing campaigns by UK small- and medium-sized enterprises were 22.87 per cent open rate and 3.26 per cent click-through rate.

(Source: Sign-up.to) The 2014 UK email marketing benchmark report, Sign-up.to, available at <http://www.signupto.com/email-marketing-benchmarks/email-benchmark-2014/>.

For all B2B marketers, a key decision to be made in most multi-channel campaigns is whether to use plain-text or HTML emails. The answer is actually quite simple — it depends on the purpose of the email. Plain-text emails will not support imagery so, when it comes to eye-catching communications for your existing leads, HTML emails and e-newsletters are a great way to stay in touch. The HTML email version will also allow you to use clickable call-to-action buttons, which can create excellent standout for the reader.

## Strong and direct copy

When it comes to generating leads and approaching cold prospects, a personalized and simple plain-text email is more likely to convince the reader that the email has been sent to them directly (and not as part of a mailing list). Plain-text emails are a great way to suggest that the email has been written from one person directly to another, thereby avoiding most people's natural reaction to delete 'marketing' emails. This strategy is, of course, dependent on personalized and targeted writing within the email, but the layout and appearance certainly help. Given that plain-text emails do not support call-to-action buttons, it is crucially important that the email and the call-to-action text provide the reader with enough reasons to want to respond. Whether the call-to-action is to call this number, email this address or visit this website, the copy within the email must be strong and direct enough to make the reader act.

## Split testing helps optimization

### Metrics, testing and analysis

65 per cent of all email gets opened first on a mobile device.

(Source: Movable Ink) US Consumer Device Preference Report Q4 2013, Movable Ink, available at <http://info.movableink.com/Device-Report-Q4-2013>.

What makes a great B2B marketing email? There is only way to find out — testing. Email success is dependent on a multitude of factors such as subject lines, send time, send day, salutation, body content and call-to-action. In order to get all of these factors performing at an optimum level, it is necessary to test and fine-tune each one individually. A/B split testing is a great way to do this. Choose two alternatives of the same email attribute such as the subject line or call to action. Divide the contact database into two equal groups and send Group 1 the first subject line (A) and Group 2 the second subject line (B). A few days after the broadcast, a comparison between the open rates will determine which subject line performed best. This process can be carried out for almost all aspects of an email and will ultimately help to find the best-performing practice for each one.

**Test one thing at a time**

Our top 3 best-performing subject lines were only 2–3 words long and 3 of our top 5 subject lines included numbers, such as dates.

*(Source: Really B2B)*

The key rule to remember when performing an A/B split test is to change only one attribute at a time. Failure to keep to this rule will result in unclear data and no benefit to the organization. For example, if different body copy and call-to-action is tested in the same email for the two groups, it will be almost impossible to determine whether the copy or the call-to-action made the difference. The only outcome here is that you have wasted time and resources with no result to show for it. The best way to create the optimum B2B marketing email is to test each attribute individually and combine the best-performing aspects of each.